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EQUESTRIAN EVOLUTIONS AND EXERCISES IN THE DESERT.

THE INDIAN NABOB:

OR, A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—A RIDE TO THE DESERT.

FOR many hours our night march was performed with rapidity and in comparative silence. Occa-

sionally my mysterious acquaintance and guide addressed me in words of trifling import and in a friendly tone, but his attendants were mute. My new situation was a strange one, certainly: fleeing from a supposed danger, in the company of one

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whose life I had saved, it is true, but of whose person, rank, character, and design I was supposed to be utterly ignorant—of whom, in fact, I knew nothing, save that he had evidently exchanged one disguise for another, probably for some powerful political reason; that he had enemies thirsting for his life; and that he was in communication with my friend and patron, from a knowledge of which I had, until that evening, been excluded, and which even then was involved in much mystery.

And this reminded me that during our detention at our palace-caravanserai at Delhi, Mr. Dalzell had occupied some time in occasionally writing to some not very distant correspondent, and that more than once our Havildar Hassan had secretly departed at night, and as secretly returned, after an absence of several days. There was nothing very extraordinary in this, and I had thought but little of the circumstance, until the event of this night brought it again to my mind. Now, I was partly admitted into the secret.

Our destination was a scene I had long wished to visit. Mr. Dalzell had reminded me of this when he urged my acceptance of Abdallah's invitation, or rather my concurrence in his peremptory decision. Let me explain. If you turn to the map, Archie, you will find that westward of the Jumna, and stretching between this tributary of the Ganges and the Indus, is a broad extent of territory, marked as the Great or Sandy Desert. This region, though not entirely destitute of population, bears, in its general features, an aspect similar to that of the deserts of Arabia. Large tracts of shifting sand, stretching to the horizon, destitute alike of water and solid soil, without a trace of vegetation, and where the traveller is often mocked in his weariness and thirst by the deceitful *mirage*, are scantily interspersed with small patches of land, growing coarse grass and grain, surrounding the wretched mud-huts of poverty-stricken ryots, or villagers. Elsewhere may be found towns of greater pretensions, and even a city, with palaces and temples; but even these are encompassed by sterility and desolation, so that it is difficult at first to conceive, either how their inhabitants are supported, or why their founders should have fixed on so unpromising a site, excepting that it might be to escape from persecution. Well, Archie, uninviting as this land may seem, its description had some charms for my youthful fancy; and now the desire to visit the desert was about to be fulfilled.

It was not till the break of day that we drew bridle; but at the first appearance of the sun above the horizon, a sudden halt was made by the whole party, who hastily dismounted and performed their morning devotions.

Archie, I was at that time but a thoughtless youth. Suffering and sorrow had not tamed and subdued the levity of my spirits, and I had not yielded my heart to the invitations of divine and sovereign mercy. The Bible, it is true, was my travelling companion, and I did not altogether neglect it; but I had paid only a formal and constrained regard to its contents. And prayer—Well, I have told you, Archie, how on two occasions I had been surprised, so to speak, into something like earnest applications to the Divine Being

for help in time of mental anguish or distress; and there had been other times—few in number, however—in which I had bent the knee, and made verbal supplication to God; but prayer—believing, Christian prayer—was none of mine. I lived, at that time, without God in the world; and yet, Archie, I felt condemned at witnessing the apparent earnestness with which these Moslems bowed themselves, and went through the prescribed formula of their devotional exercises. The sight was not new to me. I had repeatedly witnessed it before, especially in our long journey from Moorshedabad to Delhi, but I had never before been so stricken with shame; and I could but apply to myself the denunciation of our blessed Saviour, of woe, woe against those to whom divine light and knowledge had been revealed, but who would not receive them into their souls. As it was, I sat my horse silently while my companions were worshipping. Presently they remounted, and we pursued our journey.

An hour later, our leader ordered a halt. We had arrived at a grove and a fountain. Our wearied horses were accordingly divested of their trappings, and allowed to graze, while their riders prepared for refreshment and repose.

At the invitation of the chief, I seated myself by his side, and shared with him his provisions; for though a Hindoo may not eat with a Feringhi without losing caste, a Mahomedan has no such scruples, provided the food or liquid be not forbidden by his law. For a time our meal proceeded with the solemn silence which had marked our flight. At length, however, this was broken by my companion; but the intercourse it pleased him to hold with me, embarrassed as it also was with my imperfect acquaintance with his native tongue, threw no light upon the personal mystery which clung to him. In reply to a question I naturally enough put, as to the title by which he might choose to be addressed, he told me, quietly enough, that the desert was not yet reached, and that until then he was Abdallah Subahdar.

He was more explicit and frank when he spoke of the danger he had so narrowly escaped in Delhi, and the equal peril to which he would have been exposed had others, besides the mad Sanyassee, penetrated his disguise. This, indeed, I had reason to conjecture, by the hints given me by my superior; but as I had neither warrant nor desire to know more than my companion pleased to intrust voluntarily to my confidence, our conversation soon dwindled again into silence, and our eyes were presently closed in needful slumber.

It was not till after sunset that we recommenced our march, or flight; and the coming morning found us in the desert.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ENCAMPMENT IN THE DESERT.

It is not necessary for me to expatiate on the novelty and peculiar character of the scene around. Travellers with whose books you are familiar, Archie, have spoken of this, and you have only to call up their descriptions of other waste and sandy deserts, to realize an idea of that on which I had entered. Conceive, however, a wide expanse of sterility, broken only here and there by tufts and patches of coarse herbage and stunted prickly shrubs, which serve only to make the surrounding

waste appear more desolate and cursed. Imagine the surface beneath your horse's feet to be loose shifting sand, into which, at every step, your steed sinks fetlock-deep. Think that you see around you, in every direction, hills and ridges of accumulated particles of sand, heaped together by the vagaries of yesterday's wind, and which to-morrow's may disperse. Add to this, an absolute lack of shelter; no "shadow of a great rock," and no grateful overhanging foliage of grove or forest, for many a weary mile, and no stream or fountain at hand in which to quench the thirst of panting horse or weary rider; and you have before you a sufficiently tangible notion of the great desert of India.

Occasionally, however, the traveller is cheered by some green spot more favoured by nature, and affording both shade and water; and, scattered all over the desert, may be found, in this season, delicious water-melons, offering grateful refreshment to the parching thirst.

It was when we had been some hours toiling over the trackless sand, and were yet further penetrating into the desert, that a small party of horsemen—though more numerous than our own—made their appearance in the horizon. For a time they hovered around, as though watching our approach, while one of our little troop detached himself from his comrades, and boldly struck out towards them. In a few moments they met; and then arose a distinct shout which every moment brought nearer to our ears, until the two parties were intermingled. And then, amidst the flourishing of lances, the report of musketry, the flight of arrows, and the reiterated joyous shouts of Shahzâdâ and Alee Gohur, I found my suspicions confirmed, that the pretended coolie, whose life I had been instrumental in saving, was no other than the eldest son of the imbecile emperor of Delhi.

A few words between the prince and the leader of this second band passed; and then, striking across the desert, and continuing the march with a rapidity which for the time precluded any further explanation, we at length reached what seemed to be the termination of our journey.

The natural deserts of earth, like those of human existence, have their *oases*, their green and flourishing and inviting spots, where, if he might, the traveller would fain linger, and upon which, when long passed, memory looks back with regret. One of these pleasant scenes lay before us, rendered more striking by the dreariness and desolateness around. We had, in fact, approached the banks of a small stream, which, rising from the bubbling fountain in the wilderness, and presently losing itself again in the thirsty sand, had given birth to fertility and beauty in its short and transient course. Around the delicious fountain itself had sprung up a grove of cocoa-palms and wild dates, intermixed with the elegant babul tree, which furnished at the same time shade, provision, and a cheering perfume; while beneath, and along the banks of the stream, was a rich green-sward, delightful to the eye, dazzled and half blinded with the glare of the desert sands, and soft and refreshing to the tread. Flowers, too, of the most brilliant hues put forth all their loveliness, without the danger, at that time at least, of realizing the poet's regret—

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

for a lively, animated scene suddenly burst upon our sight.

Beneath the shelter of the thick foliage, and scattered along the banks of the stream, were probably more than a hundred tents, with two or three times that number of horses picketted around, while their riders were, some stretched on the grass in listless apparent indolence, others furbishing their arms, others engaged in sedentary games of chess, and others disporting themselves in mimic combats. The dress and accoutrements of these soldiers were singular, especially the latter. Few of them had fire-arms; but in their stead, their weapons of offence were bows and arrows, and long slender lances, which, as I afterwards saw, they wielded with exceeding dexterity; and in lieu of defensive armour, small shields, marvellously like pot-lids, were used by them in action, in warding the blows of the enemy. I had occasionally seen these sepahis, or sepoy (bow-and-arrow-men), but never in an entire squadron or regiment.

Evidently the approach of their commander was unexpected; but in one moment, as soon as his guards appeared in sight with his banner displayed, a shout which made the welkin ring was raised, and in the next instant every sepahi was in quick and ardent motion; the recumbent had started to their feet, the chess-players had thrown aside their rude boards, leaving kings, queens, knights, rooks, and pawns to take care of themselves; and the mimic combatants had ceased to strive. In another instant every rider had sprang fully armed into his saddle, to receive the prince with becoming homage.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ALEE GOHUR.

AND in this way it was, Archie, that I became the guest of Alee Gohur, concerning whom, as I suppose, future historians will have little to relate—save that he narrowly escaped captivity or violent death in the capital of his father's dominions—that he afterwards was a fugitive, first in the kingdom of Oude, and afterwards with the English at Calcutta—that subsequently to this, and after the assassination of Aulungeer, he was placed by the conqueror on the throne of Delhi, with the empty title of emperor, and with the mere shadow and mockery of power, and that eventually he sunk into the character and position of a pensioner on the bounty of the East India Company.

Such, I apprehend, will be the summing up of the history of a man of royal birth, who did not lack courage to battle for his birthright, nor skill and judgment in the formation of his plans, nor fidelity to his friends and followers; but who strove in vain against the overwhelming force of circumstances, and abandoned at last what might well seem the hopeless contest, satisfying himself, as he best might, with a nominally high position without honour, and life without enjoyment.

I saw Alee Gohur in after years, Archie; and it was difficult for me to recognise in the apathetic and listless though prematurely aged man, the

active, fiery, and chivalric, the fierce and generous, though, as you will presently see, revengeful roamer of the desert.

That I was hospitably treated by the young prince, at the head of his little army, scarcely needs to be told, considering the circumstances which had made me his guest. A tent was set apart for my use, and a guard, more of honour than from any apprehension of personal danger, was appointed me. I dined daily with Alee Gohur, and accompanied him in his frequent excursions. In truth, Archie, it was a pleasant enough life that I led, those three or four weeks in the desert. I was young, strong, and healthy; the exercise was delightful; the sense of freedom, which, somehow or other, such scenes generally inspire, was delicious; and there was sufficient excitement in the apprehension of possible attacks from foes, to drive away *ennui* without at all impairing the enjoyment of and the belief in perfect security.

That Alee Gohur had enemies, however, I have already shown; and when I remembered that even his own father, at the command of the powerful Afghan chief, by whose suzerainty Aulumgeer retained his feeble sceptre, had not long before endeavoured to entrap the young prince in Delhi, I wondered much that he had ventured himself in the city. This, however, with other matters, was easy enough of explanation to those who had the key to the political mysteries of those days; but even at this distance of time, Archie, it would be indiscreet in me to speak very plainly or certainly of what I then understood but imperfectly. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that I did not neglect the secret instructions with which I was charged, and which related to the young prince himself, and measures to be taken for his future safety; and that, these negotiations ended, I waited with patience my recall.

It was the custom of the young prince, almost every evening, to sit at the entrance of his tent, to witness the exercises and evolutions of his soldiers. And it was not uninteresting, Archie, to watch the gracefulness, and rapidity, and exactness of these movements; the charge; the meeting of two apparently adverse bodies of cavalry, equally matched; the mock and bloodless, but apparently fierce and furious, hand-to-hand contest; the pretended flight and pursuit; the sudden rally; and the desperate struggle renewed. This, and more, together with the flight of arrows in clouds from the bows of the sepahis, and the launching of jerrids or darts, and the shaking aloft of spears as the horsemen dashed by, gave one no faint and uncertain idea of the terrors, and at the same time the excitements, of real warfare.

One evening, as these rough sports were at their height, first a faint cloud of dust in the eastward horizon, and then a single horseman, advancing in full career towards the camp, arrested the attention of the prince's guard; and I noticed—for I was seated near—a gleam of satisfaction flushing across the swart features of Alee Gohur, when the approach of this apparent messenger was communicated to him.

"Allah be praised!" he muttered; "doubtless it is"—and he mentioned a name which did not

reach me; "and he will not have left the work unfinished; thanks to Allah for faithful friends."

Nearer and nearer came the horseman; and ere many minutes had passed by, he reached the camp. Horse and rider were alike exhausted. The horse staggered and panted frightfully ere he arrived at the goal, and the rider reeled like a drunken man when he dismounted. His countenance was haggard, either with long fasting or fatigue, or perhaps from both causes combined; while at the same time a gleam of triumph from his wild eyes, and a grim smile on his bloodless lips, gave evidence that "the work"—whatever it might be—which he had undertaken for his master, had not been negligently performed.

I noted this much, Archie, before a word escaped from his lips, and ere I had perceived that at his saddle bow hung a suspicious-looking leathern bag. This he detached from its rest, and—But I will not prolong by description the scene which followed. Few words, indeed, passed between the prince and his follower—whom I afterwards learned had been left behind at Delhi, to carry out his purpose of revenge. In another moment the bag was untied, and the ghastly and now putrid head of the Sanyassee fanatic rolled at the feet of Alee Gohur.

"May all the enemies of the Shahzâdâ be as that man!" said the fainting executioner; and a yell of satisfaction rang through the camp as the words were uttered.

"It is good!" said Alee Gohur, spurning the fearful trophy of his vengeance with his foot; "Allah be praised for faithful friends," he repeated.

"You do not like this," said he, turning to me; and if I looked as I felt, I must have seemed shocked enough at the unexpected sight. "Is it not just? Take the carrion away, however"—this to one of the guard; "it taints the air."

Thus terminated this tragedy; and though I could not deny that the Sanyassee had deserved to die for his foul attempt at assassination, I retired to my tent, sickened at the exhibition of vengeance.

You will naturally ask, Archie, why the death of Alee Gohur had been thus attempted? I cannot distinctly say: certain it is, however, that the wretch who, a year or two afterwards, could pay for the murder of the father, as standing in the way of his ambition, was equally capable of compassing the death of the son by foul means. I have no further explanation to give.*

* Mr. Dure is not very explicit on this subject. The fact is, that this portion of Indian history is complicated and muddled by the number of actors on the stage, and the cross purposes in which they were all engaged. The murderer, however, (or rather the hirer of the murderer) of Aulumgeer, was Umad al Mulk, otherwise Gazez ad Dien Khan, viceroy of the Deccan, who, assisted by the Mahrattas, was disputing and contesting with the Afghan chief, Ahmed Abdallah, for the possession of India. There were plots and counter-plots, treasons and anti-treasons, usurpations and invasions, with all their gully and detestable accompaniments and bitter fruits, until the country at length lay suppliant, so to speak, at the foot of the only people who could restore to it the blessings of peace, good government, and prosperity. This we believe to be true, whoever may gainsay it. The great cause of sorrowful regret and national reproach is, that Britain so little understood the nature and responsibility of the talent thus intrusted to her care. Meanwhile, to return to the object of this note, it is not to be wondered at if the murderer of the father did previously seek to put out of the way of his gully ambition the son, and the heir to that father's throne.

My sojourn in the desert soon ended. A few days after the event I have just recorded, another messenger arrived at the camp of Alee Gohur. This was Hassan, with instructions for me to return to Delhi. Hopeless of succeeding in his mission, and alarmed by floating and uncertain rumours of impending evil, he had determined to return to Calcutta and Zillah.

Think how my heart bounded with rapture, Archie, when I read these words.

THE GREAT SOLAR ECLIPSE IN OUR PARISH.

WE have a suspicion that the very respectable population of our parish is not fairly entitled to rank as a scientific community, though we are not going to set forth the grounds of that suspicion at present. But the whole parish are very fond of science in the abstract; our tailors cut coats, and our barbers cut hair on scientific principles; and we invariably stand up for science whenever it is necessary, as it sometimes is, to assert ourselves as friends of progress. Further, whenever science pays us a visit in a tangible shape, it is pretty sure of a tolerable welcome, and gets not only our countenance, but our courtesy and our cash too, in return for its condescension and the pains it takes, while striving for our enlightenment, to make itself agreeable. It is no marvel, therefore, that we have felt considerable interest, for the last month past and more, on the subject of the great solar eclipse, the rumours of which came in with the new year's almanack, and that it has formed a prominent topic for conversation in our intellectual circles during the long prevalence of the late east winds and fireside weather. Indeed, if we had had no scientific sympathies at all—had we been dull “as the fat weed that grows on Lethe's brink” to all such considerations—we should not have been allowed to remain apathetically unconscious. For no sooner had March shown his windy face, than a stranger, whom we shall designate Mr. Spouter, invaded our parish, and proclaimed his advent by a deluge of bills and placards, which overflowed walls, hoardings, and shop-windows, and effectually brought home to the recognition of every man, woman, and youth of the district, the fact that he, Spouter, was going to lecture, on the 12th of the month, on the subject of the great solar eclipse of 1858.

Spouter followed up his great guns by a reiterated discharge of small-arms, in the shape of duodecimo hand-bills and circulars, and kept alive the flame of public curiosity by a prudent supply of this kind of fuel. He was seconded, as the day for the lecture drew near, by a shower of illustrated papers, exhibited by the booksellers and news-venders, in which the scenery of the coming spectacle was limned in the grand style, in dark, thunderous pictures, where the unfortunate sun, in the pangs of eclipse, occupied one-third of the heavens, and the monster moon, in the guise of a Crimean bomb, was in the act of blotting him out. Portentous representations these were, and their apparition had a marked effect, especially upon the *gamins* who gathered round the shop-windows.

When the lecture came off, the hall was full; in fact, it was a complete cram, and numbers who could not squeeze in had to return unsatisfied to their homes. Mr. Spouter, unluckily, kept us waiting a good half-hour after the specified time, which, considering the cram, was not at all comfortable. But he came at last, and then he explained that his delay was occasioned by the incursion of a thief into his lodging, at the very crisis when he was making his toilet preparatory to his appearance before us. Said thief had feloniously walked off with Mr. Spouter's lecturing boots, in consequence of which he was compelled to address us in pumps. Having apologised for this necessity, he plunged at once into the business. Mr. Spouter handled the cusps of the sun and the limbs of the moon with all the ease and familiarity with which he caressed his own moustache. It was pleasant to note how completely he had the whole solar system under his thumb, and with what grace and playfulness he banded the heavenly bodies about. He informed us that we were not to anticipate total darkness; and indeed he had little doubt, if the weather proved clear, that even at the “totality,” the light would be almost equal to that of the full moon, though it would be of a peculiar colour. We were further advised to look out for some of the more brilliant planets during the time of the greatest obscuration.

The lecture was delivered on Friday, and the eclipse was coming on the Monday: Saturday, in consequence, was a day of universal preparation. The shops, everywhere, exhibited “eclipse glasses, price sixpence,” formed of a fragment of coloured crystal framed in a wooden eye-piece; but the shops found their trade undermined by the street hawkers, who supplied pedestrians with the same article for twopence. Then, at the railway station, there appeared a flaming placard, reminding the public that the eclipse would be but a partial one in our parish, and offering return tickets to a delightful spot in one of the midland counties, where it would be total, with the pleasure of a three days' excursion, first class 12s., and the second in proportion. A round number of our parishioners, therefore, resolving to see the eclipse thoroughly and creditably, started off by rail in the course of Saturday, in expectation of stealing a march upon their neighbours, and acquiring the right of holding their heads a little higher than the rest of us.

On Monday, if we may judge from appearances, everybody got out of his bed, in our parish, at least an hour earlier than usual. The morning was deliciously fine and clear, a few summer-looking clouds only spotting the vast blue dome. The newspapers had booked our parish to enter the penumbra at 41 minutes after 11, and to get out of it at 20 minutes after 2. As the critical moment approached when the spectacle should begin, the general excitement reached its climax. On the sunny side of every street, windows and doors were thrown open, and the observers, armed with telescopes, opera-glasses, spectacles, lenses, and smoked fragments of window-panes, took up their stations in eager yet solemn expectation of the event. Numbers covered the tops of the houses; a strong party had gained the summit of the church tower, and not a few had taken post on

the rising grounds which, at a mile's distance, overlooked the whole city.

But now we must leave the parish to take care of itself for a space, and look after our own personal and domestic concerns. We had, as a matter of course, our own curiosity to satisfy, and felt as much interested in the grand phenomenon as the rest of the world. By a kindly mischance, our dog Rough had on the Saturday dashed bodily through the unopened kitchen window after a burglarious grimaltkin who had audaciously invaded the premises; so there was plenty of broken glass of convenient sizes for smoking; this we had smoked according to the most approved process, and had in readiness in the back garden. As the moment of observation drew near, and we were seated in silent and solemn expectation at our post, there burst suddenly upon our ears the thready, screamy yell of the cat's-meat man, who at that instant arrived at our terrace, and proclaimed his advent in the usual way, all heedless of the sublimity of the hour. It was too bad of the man, and was really the most absurd illustration of pure bathos that could be endured. However, neither cat nor dog would allow us a moment's peace until their wants were supplied, and as Betty was out of hearing, we had to attend to the brutes ourselves; and thus it happened that we lost the only chance that offered us to contemplate the grand phenomenon. For there was the week's account to settle with the man, who was short of change; and what with the delay and the bother of the settlement, it was no sooner finished than we saw that the clouds had shut out the sun from view, and that we had lost the first part of the spectacle for ever.

Returning to the garden, we found Betty there, with an original apparatus of her own for viewing celestial phenomena. This was nothing less than a wash-tub half filled with a strong solution of blue-bag, which, having had, as she affirmed, some experience in eclipses, she assured us was by far the best mode of viewing them. She placed her tub, and brought a stool, on which she sat intently gazing in the indigo depths. Nothing came of it for the best part of an hour. At the expiration of that period there was a sudden ejaculation from a score or two of voices around and above us, of "Look!—look there!—there it is!—did you see?—no, not there! this way!"—and so on. We either had, or thought we had a glimpse of the sun ourselves, and we involuntarily exclaimed with the rest. Betty, who had seen nothing, could not stand this; she seized a piece of the smoked glass, and saw nothing still. A sudden thought seized her; she rushed into the kitchen, lighted a candle, and began smoking the bottom of a tumbler, which in her haste she cracked with the flame. No matter, it was none the worse for the purpose, and out she came and began scouring the sky at all points of the compass. All she gained by this motion was a huge black spot on the end of her nose, and considerable irritation of temper. "Why!" said she, "it's all a himperstion, and I shan't lose no more time about it!" So saying, she cleared off her apparatus, and the next minute was heard scrubbing away vigorously at her kitchen floor.

Meanwhile we solaced ourselves with the idea

that, even missing the great solar eclipse, we might behold the effects of it upon the face of nature around. We remembered Mr. Spouter's advice to look out for stars, and his expectations that at the "totality" the light would be almost equal to that of the full moon. We looked for the darkness, therefore, in which stars would be visible, but no darkness came: the gloom, it is true, deepened gradually towards one o'clock, and precisely at that hour it was almost as dark as it had been on that day week during a temporary snow-storm, but not quite. A few minutes later, and all appearances of gloom had vanished; it was a cloudy day—that was all—and nothing else was to be made of it.

We are of opinion that when two o'clock struck, and the following twenty minutes had elapsed, and the scientific part of the community knew that the affair was over, they were glad to be rid of it, and betake themselves quietly to their business. Not but that a patient and persevering few remained at their posts of observation until the day was far spent—no doubt imagining that some accident or disarrangement had deferred the exhibition from which they had been taught to expect so much, to a later hour.

On the whole, the feeling in our parish now is not quite so enthusiastic towards science as it was; there is a sort of suspicion, though no one cares to express it, or even to endorse it openly, that we have not been well treated in the matter of the great solar eclipse, and that some deception has been practised upon us. So much, even, is whispered in the educated circles.

It is wonderful how silent we are all on the affair of the eclipse, now that it is over. The subject seems to be totally dropped by general consent. As for the railway travellers who went in search of the complete thing, they are totally dumb about the business.

It is doubtful whether the announcement of the next solar eclipse will make any extraordinary sensation in Our Parish.

AN ADVENTURE AT PETRA.

IN the early part of the spring of last year I had joined a party who proposed journeying from Cairo to Jerusalem by what is usually called the "long desert route," passing by Mount Sinai, Akabah, and the famous rock-hewn city of Petra. Our party consisted of nine Englishmen, one of whom was accompanied by his wife, and our dragoman. Mohammed Gezoni had formerly travelled over the same ground with the Rev. A. P. Stanley, whose recent work on Sinai and Palestine has attracted so much attention. After spending several days amid the sublime scenery that encircles Horeb, the "mount of God," we travelled on to Akabah, at the head of the easternmost of the two arms of the Red Sea; and here we met with the first *contretemps* of our journey.

It is well known that Petra is in possession of a tribe of Bedouins, who are perhaps the most thievish and ruffianly of the Ishmaelite race. Indeed, the Fellahen of Wady Mousa, as they are called, rely almost entirely for subsistence upon the sums which they are able to extort from pass-

ing travellers; and their outrageous demands and conduct towards the few who have penetrated into their fastnesses, have caused the majority of tourists to avoid Petra, as they would have avoided the highland glen of Rob Roy, in the palmy days of that redoubtable freebooter. It was almost at the risk of their lives that Irby and Mangles visited this spot in 1818; Dr. Robinson was obliged to make a hasty retreat before he had explored half its wonders; and Burekhardt could only succeed in seeing it at all by assuming the disguise of a Mohammedan pilgrim. Latterly, however, the danger attending a visit to Petra seemed to have been much diminished. Sheikh Hussein, the powerful head of the Alouin tribe of Arabs, had made his power felt even by the lawless Fellaheen of Wady Mousa; and for some years past had been in the habit of escorting travellers through their territory, at a fixed rate of £1 for each traveller; in return for which payment he guaranteed full protection both to life and property. We had left Cairo in the full expectation of securing this sheikh on these terms. Judge, then, of our disappointment on learning, when we arrived at Akabah, that Hussein was at a distance of eight days in the interior of the country, engaged in a war with a rival tribe, and possessed neither of leisure nor inclination to escort us to Petra. Our position was now rather a vexatious one. The Arabs who had accompanied us hitherto refused to go farther with us, as their tribe had an old feud with the Fellaheen of Wady Mousa, and it was as much as their lives were worth to venture into the territory of their implacable foes. Alone, it was of course impossible to proceed; and we had no course open to us but either to take another and very circuitous route to Palestine, entirely omitting Petra, or else to venture into that ancient capital of Idumea under the protection of another tribe of Arabs, the Tiyahas, whose sheikh, though on good terms with the Fellaheen, yet had no such control over them as had Sheikh Hussein. After some deliberation, we decided on the latter of these courses, and to the same conclusion came also three other parties, whom we met at Akabah, and whose plans, like our own, had been deranged by the failure of our expected escort. Accordingly our united caravan, now consisting of twenty-one Europeans—three of them ladies—set off, by the great Haj road, in the direction of Nahkl, a solitary fort in the Desert of El Tih, and the headquarters of the tribe from which we hoped to obtain a guard to Petra.

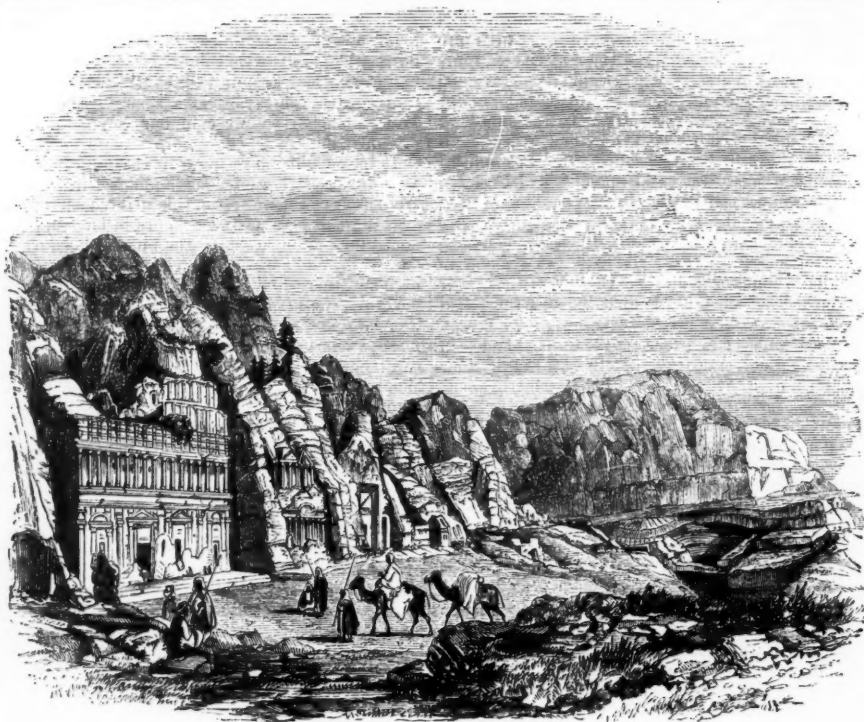
We reached this place on the fourth day after leaving Akabah, and had to wait three days more whilst a sufficient number of camels was being collected for our further progress. Our new protectors from the first gave us to understand that they would have nothing to do with any difficulty which might arise between ourselves and the Fellaheen at Petra. They were willing to take us there, but refused to give any guarantee against extortion or violence. And seeing we could obtain their escort on no better terms, we were obliged to content ourselves with such as they offered. We were, however, encouraged by the thought that it was by no means impossible to get into Petra and out again without the Arabs knowing anything of our visit, till it was too late for the purposes of

robbery. The Fellaheen do not live in Petra itself, but in a village two miles distant; and we flattered ourselves that by a little extra caution and expedition, we might altogether escape a rencontre with these rapacious sons of the desert. How mistaken we were in our calculations will presently appear.

It took us five days to go from Nahkl to Mount Hor, the most conspicuous landmark in the western border of Edom. From this point, a narrow and very difficult pass, of three hours in length, introduced us to the heart of the ancient Seir, a wild district of rock and glen, precipice and ravine, with here and there a little oasis of verdure, but, as a general rule, of a barren and savage aspect. It was late in the evening of Thursday, the 2nd of April, when we stood on a height overlooking the ruins of Petra, which filled a spacious valley of about a mile in length, with numerous offshoots, running back in all directions among the mountains. Before we reached this spot, several of our party had taken the opportunity to ascend Mount Hor, the view from which was sublime in the extreme. The whole country appeared like a heaving sea, whose waves had suddenly been converted into stone.

The ground chosen for our encampment was a grassy plateau, about one hundred yards square, commanded on three sides by precipitous rocks, honeycombed with tombs and caverns, and on the fourth shelving steeply down into a wide valley, that was probably the principal street of the city in ancient times. The only means of exit was by the pass through which we had entered, which at this extremity was not more than six or eight feet wide, and was shut in on either side by tall and rugged cliffs. The process of pitching our tents was rendered somewhat longer than usual by the necessity we were under of searching for snakes, scorpions, and centipedes, some dozens of which were killed by the Arabs in a very short space of time. In other respects our situation was pleasant enough. It was dry and sheltered; the view over the ruins was exceedingly fine, and the ground was covered with shrubs, grass, and wild flowers, the first we had seen for many weary weeks of desert travel. But as a strategical position it was utterly worthless. We were completely at the mercy of any one who held the heights around us, and could be picked off with perfect ease by marksmen concealed in the caves and behind the detached crags, without our catching even a glimpse of our assailants. And to attempt the passage of the defile by which we had entered, when the rocks on either side were held by enemies, would be but to provoke a repetition of the Khyber tragedy, on a small scale. This, however, was the only good camping-ground in the place.

We were rather surprised, on arriving at the spot above described, to find it occupied by a party of about twelve English and Americans, whom we had previously met at Cairo. They had arrived at Akabah a few days after we had quitted it, and had succeeded in finding an Alouin, of some weight with his tribe—Abouraschid, a relative of Sheikh Hussein's—who had undertaken to conduct them to Petra on terms similar to those on which we had agreed with the Tiyahas. Our friends had shown more foresight than we had: they had left



EXCAVATED ROCK TEMPLES OF PETRA.

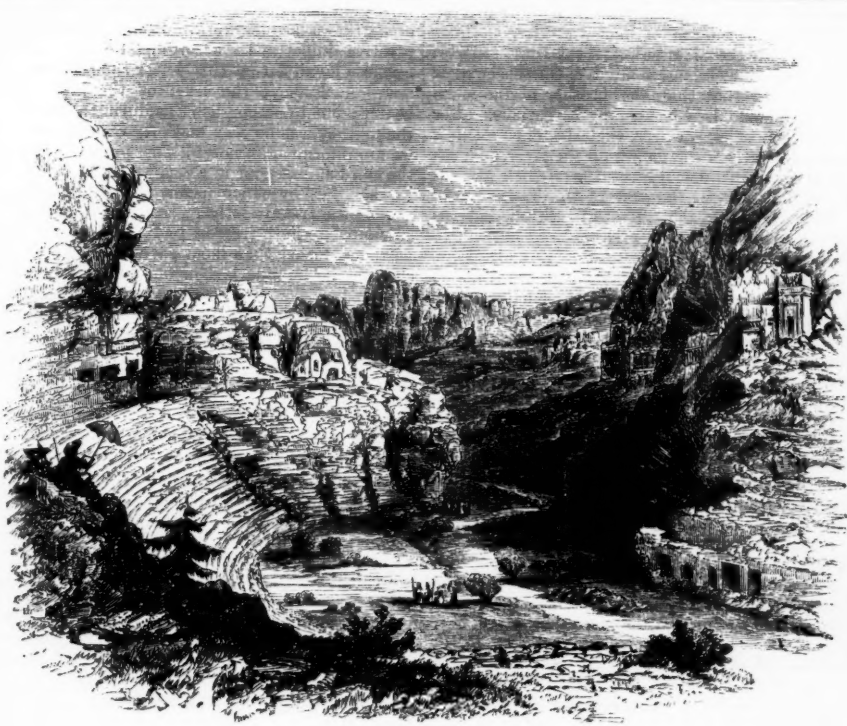
their tents and baggage on the other side of Mount Hor, and had made, as it were, a flying incursion into the dangerous territory, bringing with them but the barest necessities of food and bedding, and one small tent for a lady who was in their party. The rest were contented to sleep in the tombs and caves dug in the rock. They had posted scouts in all directions, had their dromedaries secured in a ravine close by, and were ready to clear off at the first intimation of approaching danger. The wisdom of these precautions will be apparent in the sequel.

We, who had brought all our tents and equipage, encamped in the usual way, and our camels were soon widely dispersed in search of pasturage. The first night passed without any alarm. Not a hostile Bedouin was to be seen, and we began to augur favourably for the success of our expedition, and to joke our friends on their unnecessary caution and watchfulness. The night, indeed, proved so cold that they half regretted having left their tents behind, and were glad to accept such accommodation as we could offer them in our temporary habitations.

At an early hour in the morning we were astir, and exploring the wonders of this ancient city. Roberts's beautiful lithographic views give a very good idea of the general appearance of the ruins, which consist of houses, temples, and tombs hewn out of the sandstone rock, which is here remarkable for the variety and richness of its tints, disposed in waving streaks and fantastic marble patterns, as

peculiar and unique as they are magnificent. In a few square feet of rock you see light pink, deep crimson, all the intermediate shades of red, orange, saffron, purple, green, grey, and numerous other colours, disposed with more beauty of effect than was ever displayed by modern house decorator, and astonishing the beholder by the regularity and harmony with which they are blended. It is worth visiting Petra to admire this wonderful phenomenon of nature alone.

The façades of nearly all the excavations are enriched with fine sculpture and architectural ornaments. These are chiefly pilasters and cornices, carved doorways and windows, and balustraded terraces approached by staircases cut out of the solid rock. It is calculated that these rock-dwellings would afford accommodation for a population of thirty thousand. The theatre, which, like the rest of the city, is hewn out of the natural rock, would seat an audience of five thousand. This ruin has one very peculiar feature. The cliffs that surround it, and also those facing it on the opposite side of the valley, are perforated with innumerable caves, the tombs of the former inhabitants of Petra. It is in fact the centre of an immense cemetery, and the thoughtless throng that crowded its benches must have always had before their eyes the solemn mementoes of their own mortality. How strongly would a thoughtful mind have been impressed by this juxtaposition of sepulchral scenes and the cruel and frivolous sports of the ancient amphitheatre! But it is to be feared



RUINS OF THE AMPHITHEATRE AT PETRA.

that the heathen multitudes who assembled here were wholly insensible to the serious reflections which might have been suggested by the strange spectacle around them.

Before I go any further in the account of my own visit to Petra, perhaps there are some of my readers who may wish to know a little about the history of that wonderful city.

[To be continued.]

TWO SIAMESE EMBASSIES, OF THE 17TH AND 19TH CENTURIES.

NEARLY two hundred years have intervened between the mission of two embassies from the distant and little-known kingdom of Siam to two of the greatest courts in Europe. In the year 1686, M. de Chaumont, who had been sent as envoy to the king of Siam by the "Grand Monarque," Louis XIV, returned again to France, accompanied by three ambassadors and their suite from the court of Siam. In the year 1857, as the result of Sir John Bowring's mission to Bangkok, three other ambassadors with their numerous suite were presented at the court of Great Britain: these latter, until very recently, were still daily to be encountered in the streets of London, or paying flying visits to one or the other of our chief commercial towns. On both occasions these embassies came furnished with rich presents from the king their

master, to the crowned head at whose court they presented their credentials. On both occasions, too, there was ceremony and etiquette observable on their reception. But it cannot be uninteresting to observe what a wide difference exists between the manner in which the Siamese embassy was received in France, in 1686, and the way in which its arrival was hailed in England in 1857. Let it be borne in mind, however, that although Europe, and perhaps many other portions of the globe, have made rapid and gigantic strides in civilization during the long interval which has intervened between the two missions, Siam remains almost, if not entirely, in *statu quo*. With this consideration before our eyes, and a knowledge that the Siamese possess a graphic account of the mission of 1686 (often, perhaps, studied by the members of the present embassy), we shall be enabled to form some conception of the opinions entertained by the present envoys, relative not only to scenes and customs through which they have passed, and which, at the time of our writing, are daily forcing themselves upon their attention, but to the adequacy of the reception afforded them in this country, as compared with that afforded to the embassy to Paris.

Before entering further upon this subject, and just to give a notion of what the Siamese then thought, and still probably think, of the power of the British nation, be it understood that when the writer of this paper was at Bangkok, during

the last Chinese war, as junk after junk arrived and brought tidings of our victories, nothing could induce the Siamese to believe these reports; they laughed at them, scouted them, declared it to be absurd that the elder brother of the moon and sun should be harassed by barbarians. For precaution's sake, however, they stretched a ship's chain-cable across the mouth of the river, and, satisfied with this defence, set the British at defiance. This was in the year 1840. The Siam of 1686 had changed little, if at all, within that interval. And now for a brief sketch of the two embassies.

M. de Chaumont, accompanied by the Abbé de Choisy (who had a most reprehensible addiction to clothing himself in women's apparel), set out on an embassy for Siam, the objects of which were then partially obtained; so much so that the Jesuits had land given them to build churches upon; commercial privileges were accorded; and, what was still more strange, the prime minister promised that if a strong body of troops were sent out from France, they should be placed in a position that would give them a commanding influence over the country. On their return to France, this embassy was accompanied by three Siamese ambassadors, their suite consisting of eight mandarins and twenty servants. In due course of time this embassy reached Versailles, and their arrival was hailed with acclamations of delight. They remained nine months in France, and during the whole of this period were tracked by a "special correspondent" of M. de Vire, the editor of the "*Mercure Galant*." On the other hand, the Siamese ambassadors kept secretaries hard at work recording the most minute incidents of their embassy, and this work was eventually published in Siam.

On the 19th of June the Siamese ambassadors reached Brest, where they remained thirteen days. On the fourteenth, M. Storff, of the king's household, deputed to wait on the embassy during its stay, arrived and welcomed the illustrious strangers in the king's name. He told them that his Majesty had ordered that nothing should be left undone that could in any way contribute to their comfort or pleasure. He told them, moreover, that the king would have sent his own carriages to convey them to Paris, only the roads between the capital and the chief naval station were impassable, and they must consequently travel in litters. Their Excellencies expressed themselves quite content so to travel, and highly flattered by the gracious reception accorded them; so much so that, if they could get to the king quickest on foot (such was their desire to be in his Majesty's august presence), they would set off in marching order immediately. One hundred and thirty-two packages of heavy baggage were sent round by sea to Havre and the Seine, and the embassy started for Paris. Twelve days afterwards they reached Vannes, and were received with great distinction by the Parliament of Brittany, and at Roche-Bernard they exchanged litters for wheeled conveyances.

The king of Siam's letter to his royal brother of France seems to have proved a perpetual source of trouble and anxiety. This letter, as is the custom when Siamese royalty addresses other royalty, was written on a golden plate, locked first

in a gold box, next in silver, and then in a case of Japanese lacquer work. It was a point of imperative importance, according to the code of Siamese loyalty, that this letter should always be maintained above the level of the head of its bearer; but to accomplish this during all stages of the journey was no easy matter. On one occasion, we are informed, an hotel-keeper proposed lodging the third ambassador in a room over that occupied by the first, by which means he would have slept above the royal letter. As this would have amounted to high treason in Siam, the third ambassador, rather than incur such a risk, preferred sharing the humble bed of one of his suite. At length, however, the letter was safely deposited in the chief ambassador's room at Paris, and ultimately reached the royal hands it was destined for.

When Nantes received the ambassadors, M. de Molac, the then governor, met them outside of the gates, at the head of all the young nobility of the district, accompanied by numerous carriage-loads of ladies, and conducted them into the town under a heavy artillery salute. The day afterwards, it is recorded that their Excellencies, on reaching Anciens, indulged in a bath—a proceeding that appeared so novel to the "special correspondent" of the "*Mercure*," that he deems it worthy of some comment. Even after meals they often washed!—a rather surprising instance of oriental scrupulosity as regards ablutions, which seems to have astonished the French people much, at a period when even the "Great King" himself is reported to have shaved only every other day. How it would have astonished the French of that day, and how it would surprise and amuse both French and English of the present day, if they could suddenly be transported to the banks of the Menam, and there behold princes and beggars, with their wives and families, even from the little one that is just beginning to toddle about, take to the water as naturally as ducks, and sport about in the pleasant sunshine like grampuses at play! Nevertheless, such is the daily practice of the Siamese; and the probability is that the ambassadors, who "actually bathed after meals," had never gone so long without a *duck* as during that tedious journey from Brest to Anciens.

From Anciens the embassy travelled in magnificent style through Angers, where the Mayor treated them with sweetmeats; thence through Tours, Clenbourse, Blois, and Orleans, welcomed with salutes, reviews, and other public demonstrations. We are told that the ambassadors evinced great curiosity and nicety of observation whilst visiting the objects of interest in all the above-mentioned old towns. They are said to have counted the very stones and windows in front of houses, and the trees by the roadside and in the gardens, making copious notes the while, which were regularly transcribed every evening by the secretary of the legation. Finding it impossible to be everywhere, and see everything, during the brief space they sojourned at each halting-place, they detached mandarins, accompanied by interpreters, as flying scouts into the surrounding country, and then incorporated their reports into their own official diary.

M. Brescaire, the chief of foreign missions, received the embassy at Fontainebleau on the

29th of July, and regaled them with a speech of more than a quarter of an hour's duration. Next day they moved on to Versailles, and thence to the house of the Abbé de Saint Genevieve at Bernay, where they took up their residence until the day appointed for their formal entry into Paris. During this interval, it would seem that the ambassadors had very little leisure time on hand. The delay in their presentation at court arose from the non-arrival of the heavy baggage shipped to Havre, which contained the presents from the king of Siam (then valued at £30,000), to Louis XIV, and without which, according to Siamese etiquette, no presentation could take place. Nearly thirty days elapsed before this baggage arrived; but in that interval the envoys were inundated with visitors from Paris and Versailles. All the notables either came in person or sent to congratulate them upon their safe arrival. Amongst these was M. Bonneuil, introducer of ambassadors. The lady visitors were very numerous and very inquisitive, the existence of a law for plurality of wives in Siam being amongst them an inexhaustible theme of conversation. They quizzed the ambassadors upon this subject, and the ambassadors, we are informed, retorted their badinage in a way which astonished even the wits of that day.

The 22nd of August was the day fixed upon for the public entry of the Siamese embassy into Paris; but on that day they did not present their credentials to the king. On this subject we will not be prolix. Suffice it to say that there were sixty carriages, each drawn by six horses, and containing one male representative of the distinguished owners, in addition to the coach of the dauphins, the carriages of the princes of the blood royal, besides those of the ministers and other great officers of state. In short, the display is said to have been unrivalled in those days. The king's illness prevented their immediate reception, but during the interval they were entertained at state expense with princely magnificence at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs. The anniversary of the procession of the Roman Catholic festival of the Day of Assumption chancing to occur, the ambassadors visited Notre Dame, and saw so much to surprise and interest them there, that they kept four secretaries at work that evening, reducing their notes into order. Throughout, they seem to have evinced an astonishing thirst for the acquisition of useful and novel information, which, however, in the lapse of years, has unhappily led to no beneficial results.

Of the procession itself, we hear that on the day appointed for the reception (the 1st of September), the Duc de Feuillade, with the king's coaches, arrived early in the morning, to convey the ambassadors to Versailles. The French and Swiss guards, in full uniform, with flags flying, etc. were drawn up in the great courtyard through which the illustrious visitors passed, alighting at the Salle de Descente, where ambassadors were accustomed to await their audience. A breakfast was here served, when the Siamese declined (to the surprise of the "special correspondent"), preferring to avail themselves of the opportunity to indulge in—a wash. After this, they occupied themselves about their state or court toilet. The first and second ambassadors wore gold coronets,

set round with flowers of rubies and leaves of gold. The third was shorn of these costly jewels, being of an inferior rank. As soon as the king had ascended his throne of silver, dressed in a gorgeous suit, blazing with jewels (the estimated value of which amounted to several millions of livres), and surrounded by all the paraphernalia of his court, the embassy were admitted to an interview. The king of Siam's autograph was protected from the sun's rays by four parasols, and borne aloft in the air by twelve of the Swiss guard.

The ambassadors, on catching a first sight of the king, raised their joined hands on high, and thus, after the custom of their country, saluted him with three profound reverences. At the end of the lane of courtiers, the suite filed off left and right, and, prostrating themselves to the ground, averted their heads from the throne, as though dazzled by its splendour; "and," says the "Mercure," "in this posture they would have continued, had not the king been graciously pleased to permit them to look on him, saying that they had come too far to be deprived of so slight a gratification." With many more such fulsome compliments and absurdities, the embassy was received and dismissed, after partaking of a banquet served in magnificent style. The upshot of all these ceremonials, and of the embassies to and fro, was that, when the Siamese legation returned to Siam, the first ambassador, backed by the native party, made null and void every article of the treaty by murdering Monsieur Constance (the French representative), and expelling the French troops from Siam.

One hundred and seventy years have elapsed since that date: our possessions in India have meanwhile been perpetually augmenting, and at the present time constitute a vast emporium of commerce; the still more distant empire of China has also for many years become a highway for European traffic; but Siam to this day remains almost a sealed country—a *terra incognita*. British enterprise, however, and the pushing efforts of our Manchester manufacturers, aided by the little light thrown upon the resources of this vast and wealthy kingdom from the pens of casual adventurous travellers who had penetrated thus far eastward, have at last, we hope, succeeded in invading the oyster-like seclusion of the king and people of Siam. That much mutual benefit must arise to both countries from unrestricted commercial intercourse, none can gainsay.

Siam, in almost every respect, is the same to-day as it was in 1686. The country still yields the same productions; there are still ivory and gamboge in abundance; spices are yet plentiful, and the sugar cane continues to flourish; but although its commerce has not in the slightest degree retrograded, it has not hitherto spread one jot. The valuable and immense resources of this kingdom have yet to be developed.

So, also, as concerns the manners, customs, and habits of the people. Their chief cities are still principally constructed of wood, which float by means of bamboo rafts on the river. The white elephant is still held in special veneration; their superstitions are as deeply rooted as ever, and their ignorance keeps pace with these superstitions. To this day the Talapoints, or priesthood,

continue an institution of indolent and unlearned men, commanding contributions as they ply from door to door, and subsisting entirely upon the forced charity of the public. To this day their minor crimes subject them to the punishment of being forced to cut grass and boughs of trees to supply the white elephant with food; whilst any breach of the laws of celibacy is punished with a certain and a cruel death. Even now, the citizens traffic in their own daughters, who are sold publicly for a few dollars, or bartered for other merchandise. The trumpet still sounds after the king's breakfast, according permission to all other subjects to follow the royal example, and fall to and eat. Men, women, and children are still almost amphibious, spending nearly half their time in the water. If the Siamese have advanced in anything, it is in the art of ship-building, and for any other little light or information diffused amongst them they are indebted to those few hardy pioneers of the Christian faith, the American missionaries, who for many years past have made their home amongst them; and, to give the Siamese their due, they have tolerated the presence of these excellent men far better than many other heathen states, especially the bordering one of Cochin China.

And now, in conclusion, let us take a brief review of the recent embassy, and draw a parallel between it and the mission to Paris in 1686. Although Siam had made little or no progress since the last embassy, the members of the present mission were not long left in doubt as to the immense strides Europe had taken in civilization. At the very first outset, they embarked upon a man-of-war steamer—perhaps the neatest and most compact model of what the wonderful art of steam could accomplish in this shape. The French embassy must have had very indifferent vessels, and their progress homeward probably occupied seven or eight months. Before the present embassy had long lost sight of Siam, they were landed at Singapore; before they had had time to rub their eyes and express astonishment at the many novelties that opened around them, they were spirited away past Penang—past Ceylon—and so on to Aden. Barely had their eyes recovered the painful glare from Aden's black rock, before they were thrust on Suez Sands, and whisked off in light omnibuses to Cairo's Grand City. Scarcely was their dignity here compromised by unscrupulous donkey boys, than they were whirled off by railway-travelling, and shot out at Alexandria, to be again ruffled by the unfeeling proprietors of asses.

Did they miss their esteemed garlic pickles all this while? were they at a loss for betel nut? I really cannot say, but no doubt the steward of the steam-vessel made them as comfortable as possible; and though beef was a forbidden thing, there was abundance of other good cheer to gladden their illustrious hearts.

And now, as we trace their path onward, we find that at Malta there was some slight demonstration in honour of their Excellencies. At Plymouth the authorities turned out to do them honour. The next thing we heard of them was that they were quietly established at Claridge's hotel; and some weeks afterwards, a paragraph in

the "Times" informed us that her Majesty at Windsor had received the Siamese ambassadors; and then followed a list of the costly presents sent by the king to the Queen of England. We have heard of no tremendous processions, no rush of aristocratic lords and ladies to welcome the illustrious strangers, no deafening roar of cannon, or such like demonstrations. Many gentlemen went to visit their Excellencies—not out of curiosity, however; these visitors were chiefly mercantile men and manufacturers; and bright visions would open up before them as they surveyed the costly silks that the ambassadors were decked in, and they meditated on the possibility of bartering Manchester goods for the rich products of Siam, at no distant day. Occasionally a mob, gathered round a jeweller's, with a few policemen at the door, would cause the curious to pause and peep, and what they saw convinced them that there really was such an extraordinary thing as a Siamese embassy in London.

It is to be hoped that their Excellencies possess sound sense and good judgment, and can appreciate a quiet hearty reception better than a roaring, boisterous, empty display. The old proverb of "Great cry and little wool" was well exemplified in the Siamese mission to France of 1686. At present the two kings are said to be educated, tolerant men, possessing a fluent knowledge of the English language, and we have a consul and three assistant interpreters residing at Bangkok. To possess a knowledge of the language of the people amongst whom we reside, is to arm one's self with a power which, if judiciously used, is superior to mere physical force. Let us hope that these embassies, so propitiously commenced, may terminate as favourably as is to be expected from the present aspect of affairs; that these friendly interchanges may lead to free and unrestricted commerce, which, once firmly established, will be the pioneer to brighter and better days for that now benighted kingdom.

If the present embassy, like its predecessors of 1686, are busily compiling notes of what they have heard and seen in England, and what they have since witnessed in France—after expressing their astonishment at the ignorance of English ladies in the art of swimming, describing their visit to the Leviathan, etc., we trust they will not omit to give due credit to English courtesy and forbearance; underlining the paragraph stating that, despite the law of the land, and the bye-law of companies, they were permitted to persist in smoking in the presence of Royalty, and inside of first-class railway carriages.

A DOSE OF PHYSIC.

DOSES of physic are proverbially disagreeable. We make wry faces at them, though they are meant to do us good. The words "doctor's stuff" have become bye-words for something unpleasant. What right have I, therefore, to prescribe unpleasant stuff for the hale and hearty ladies and gentlemen who read the "Leisure Hour?"

For this sufficient reason—that more than half the unpleasantness which people associate with physic is referable to false ideas as to the sources

of physic—ideas which might have been justified in bygone times, though totally inadmissible now. Concealment often begets more terror than the fullest scrutiny; and I am sure it is thus with physic.

Any person who takes a glance at the contents of a druggist's shop will be likely to come away with exaggerated ideas of the number of original medicines. Practically, however, the really potent medicinal agents—those which a physician considers to be his sheet-anchors—those on which he especially relies in cases of emergency—are not so many. Each original medicine is frequently dressed up into many forms—dry for powders, moist and soft for pills, and fluid either by way of tincture, decoction, or infusion. Each of the chief agents of physic may thus assume many guises. But, besides the primary agents, there are what we may call *outside medicines*—things which are wholly, or almost wholly, devoid of energy, but are nevertheless valuable in imparting agreeable tastes, odours, or colours.

All three kingdoms of Nature—animal, vegetable, and mineral—contribute to the stores of our physic: the first, however, more sparingly than the others; so that, with the exception of the so-called Spanish flies, or cantharides—the effective agents in blistering salve, and which are frequently made into tincture, and administered internally—no physic-material of any great potency is derived from the animal kingdom. I will not even except musk and castoreum—the former a product of the musk deer, and the latter obtained from the beaver. Both had high medicinal qualities attributed to them formerly, and still have by some practitioners. Musk and castoreum are, however, not amongst the sheet-anchors of medicine.

Perhaps it would be ungrateful not to stretch a point, and give a passing word of recognition to the medicinal leech (*Hirudo officinalis*), though the function of this little animal be rather surgical than medical; and having stretched our courtesy thus far, let us pay our respects to the *Physeler macrocephalus*, from whose thick head we derive the bland and mollifying spermaceti, so useful in the manufacture of spermaceti ointment—a very proper application to blistered surfaces, but useless as respects inward bruises. Considerably indebted, too, are medical men to pigs and sheep—the one for lard and the other for suet; both of which are largely employed in the formation of various salves and ointments. But, considered in the sense of a powerful medicine, and not as a mere agent for enveloping or conveying it, cantharides, or Spanish flies, have unquestionably the *place d'honneur* amongst medicine-yielding animals. Cantharides are a very energetic drug; the energy dependent upon the presence of a property, which, by the way, is a violent poison. It is an extraordinary fact that, although there are animal poisons in great number and of tremendous activity—such, for example, as the poison of snakes, and of hydrophobic animals—cantharidine, as far as I can remember, is the only animal poison amenable to chemical tests. So, cantharides, or Spanish flies, are, medicinally considered, important creatures. It is interesting to know, therefore, that they do not come from Spain, but

chiefly from the south of Russia. They are Muscovites: no wonder they make us smart so!

Enter we now into the domain of the great vegetable kingdom, to cast a glance at the medical resources thereto belonging. But wherefore is it, I first would ask, that every inventor of a patent pill hastens to assure the public, by reckless squandering of printers' ink on double-leaded advertisements, that his pills are vegetable pills, containing not one atom of any mineral compound? Why is it the public accept this assurance as synonymous with innocence? I ask for information, that some person may answer me—not that I may reply to *myself*. I never could discover the reason for thus associating the notion of innocence with vegetables, and looking on mineral bodies as the *bêtes noires* of the pharmacopœia. Compared, in respect of potency, with all that either art or nature developes out of the mineral world, the vegetable kingdom as far transcends the latter as a sixty-horse power steam-engine transcends the power of a smoke-jack. Between the most potent mineral agents and the most potent vegetable ones—understanding by potency relative power of influencing the human constitution—the difference is so enormous, that to apply the attribute of superior innocence to vegetables is something preposterous. Some readers, perhaps, there are, who will remind me that I have laid myself under promise to deal with medical bodies—not poisonous ones. In truth, however, the terms are nearly, if not quite, identical. Medicinal agency assumes the existence of power; poisonous agency likewise. Dependent upon the circumstance whether the power be judiciously or injudiciously applied, one and the same agent may be a medicine or a poison.

The greater number of medicinal vegetables come from abroad; nevertheless, Great Britain and Ireland produce many, nor are these of small importance. First, perhaps, in rank amongst the number of our indigenous medical plants comes purple foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*.) Foxglove leaves are precious to the medical man. I perhaps may be justified in numbering digitalis amongst the sheet-anchors of physic; at any rate, it very nearly approaches that value. The great medical, or rather the physiological, peculiarity of digitalis is that it lessens the energy of the heart's action. Of all animal organs the heart is hardest worked. From birth to death, no matter how long protracted the period of life may be, the heart must go on working. Just think what the heart has to do; expanding, collapsing, pumping and palpitating, without a moment's rest. One might think this hard and continuous work might well prevent the heart from pumping blood too furiously. Not so. Occasionally the walls of this member become preternaturally thick and strong; the heart itself inordinately vigorous, wild, and turbulent; driving blood through the arteries with unwonted force. What should you expect under these circumstances? Suppose we place the matter in this light. You or I have a garden syringe, a strong syringe, but the pipes attached to it are weak. If the syringe be gently used, all goes well, and there is no leakage, no rupture, no escape of water, except by the nose or jet through which its escape was intended. You caution your gardener

to work the piston gently; you tell him the pipes are weak—that too much energy on his part will burst them. *Digitalis* conveys this sort of order to an overworking (hypertrophied) heart; and what is more to the purpose, it causes the order to be respected. Of course it should only be used under the order of a medical man.

On some light and sandy knoll, shaded by overhanging brushwood from extreme fervour of the solar rays, the pedestrian through our bye-ways occasionally meets with the henbane plant (*hyoscyamus*). Henbane leaves furnish a valuable agent to the repertory of physic-stuff, or materia-medica. The juice of henbane leaves is either evaporated to an extract of which pills are made, or the leaves themselves, being digested with spirit, yield a tincture. When properly administered, henbane diminishes pain and causes sleep. It is not so powerful in these respects as opium, but is devoid of some bad consequences which occasionally follow the administration of the latter.

Hiding in shady places, too—but those more damp, and earthy, and rich than the places chosen by henbane—the handsome though fearful belladonna, or deadly night-shade, rears its lurid head and ripens its cherry-like fruit. Every part of this vegetable is terribly poisonous, and the active principle, which can be extracted from it by chemical means, is one of the most virulent bodies known. Preparations of belladonna are used both medically and surgically. To the surgeon, however, belladonna is of major importance: he employs it to prepare the eye for various surgical operations.

Monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*) is frequently to be met with in our flower-gardens—more often, perhaps, than desirable. Roots of this plant have been frequently mistaken for horseradish roots, and poisoning and death have resulted from swallowing their shavings. Beyond the circumstance of whiteness, which is common to both roots, there is not, however, the remotest similarity between them. From every part of the monkshood an alkali—or, as some will choose to call it, alkaloid—is extracted, which, though possessed of dangerous properties, is an agent of great value to the medical man in alleviating pain.

Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) is endowed with properties the very reverse of monkshood. The latter destroys sensation, not motion; but hemlock, or rather its active principle, "conia," leaves sensation intact, but destroys the ability to move.

Amongst the powerful medicinal vegetables which grow at home, and which contribute to the resources of physic, meadow saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*) should not be omitted. Its active principle is also an alkali or alkaloid, highly poisonous, but nevertheless endowed with great controlling powers over gout, rheumatism, and certain other diseases. We are rapidly exhausting the list of medicines of British vegetable growth—I mean vegetable bodies of powers generally and strongly accredited—bodies having each its recognised place in the Pharmacopœia, and each possessing an energy so violent, that it ought not to be used except under the condition of medical sanction and advice. The medical resources of British vegetables must not, however, be estimated

by the pharmacopœial list. Many British vegetables are capable of yielding good medicines, which they simply do not because agents still better are available. Thus, honeysuckle berries have somewhat the nature of jalap; and the root of the common violet would make no bad substitute for ipecacuanha.

CHINESE-SHAPED POEMS.

THE French had once a fashion of writing and printing what were called shaped poems, in which (when in type) the forms of a lady's fan, a bottle, a wine-glass, etc. were neatly imitated. This, with sad torture to the verse, was done by shortening or lengthening the lines, according to the outline of the form to be filled up. Thus, a number of short lines would go to make up the neck of the bottle or decanter; while others, by being gradually lengthened, would produce the shoulder, the body, and other parts. Plenty of specimens are to be found in French books of the seventeenth century, and tricks of the same kind have been performed in Italian and in English. If the reader will take up any of those irregularly-shaped compositions which go under the name of Pindaric Odes, he will see what a variety of queer shapes are to be formed by drawing a pencil round the edges of the verses or lines, which are now long, now short, now long again for a series of lines, then short again for a succession, and so on.

The Japanese sometimes write poetry in the Hirakana character, arranging the letters in the form of a man's head or entire person, and give the reader a profile of the poet at the same time that they give him a stanza or stanzas of his poem. This is carrying shaped poetry to a far greater length than was ever known in Europe.

The Chinese also have their shaped poems; but it is to be noted that in these the shapes or forms are not filled up by lines of different lengths, but are produced merely by arranging characters in outline. We have before us a popular shaped ballad, which at the first glance would be taken only for the rude outlines of a cow with a boy leading it. But if you look closer you see that the rough lines are formed of distinct Chinese characters, which unite into a meaning and even into rhythm. With the cow, you must begin your reading at the left shoulder, and proceed by heptameters round to the tail. The herdboys song begins with the right hand of the figure. The ballad is found in the eighth volume of a Chinese collection, entitled "Family Gems," but being slightly varied, it is sold in the streets by begging pedlars and Buddhist priests. The cow part of the ballad is called "The Cow's Complaint." Being literally translated, the poor cow speaks thus:—

"Please, noble sir, hearken to my tale and all my complaints;
In the wide world none have sorrows like the poor cow."

And after this commencement, in the style of "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man," she goes on to deplore that she is made to work hard at the plough, is flogged with whips made of hard hide, and much abused with brutal words; that she never gets her fair share of pasture, or food, or drink; that her master, after working her so

hard himself, hires her out to till the ground for others; that, whenever he is short of money at the season of tax-paying, he threatens to sell the old cow; and that, when worked off her legs, she is sure to be sold to the butcher, to be turned into beef and eaten. She ends her lamentations by referring to the Buddhist doctrine of the metempsychosis, and by wishing that when her persecutors next live upon earth, they may all be ploughmen's cows.

The herdboy's song is in a more cheerful strain. This curious specimen of Chinese idyls is thus rendered, verse by verse:—

"We lend our herds to the east or west, to the pastures far and near;
No one hinders and no one goads us, passing the time as we list;
Calling to each other to cut the green bamboo, and make our new style pipes;
Or, ranged in rows we part the sedgy grass, our old rain-cloaks to mend;
Or thus at our ease, with wetted hands, we twist the heifer's cord,
Tuning our voices and learning our lays, to sing the herdman's song.
Once and again we laugh, pointing to the troubled rich man, saying,
'Your legs unceasing travel back and forth, what can the matter be?'
The back of a horse with that of a cow, for sureness won't compare.
By groves and fountains in the coppice deep, there at our ease we play."

In order to attract the notice of the populace, the priests of Buddha, in China, sometimes arrange the words of their prayers or precepts in various fantastic shapes—shapes much more complicated than those of ladies' fans and wine-decanter. When printed in these queer forms, the sheets are distributed among the people, or sold at a very cheap rate, their oddity being their chief recommendation. They have a book of prayers arranged like a seven-storied pagoda, printed on a sheet three English feet long: on each story, excepting the fourth, is a rude picture or outline of Buddha, and the whole building, with its ornaments, steps, mouldings and cornices, is formed of Chinese characters, kept separate by fine lines, and all perfectly legible. On the basement of the pagoda is a representation of Buddha sitting on a lotus, and on each side are priests reciting prayers. Small drawings of the god are also interspersed in the different stories, and serve to relieve the heavy appearance of the mass of character. Even the bells, which are suspended from the projecting angles of each story, have characters on them which continue the prayer or discourse. The whole matter, when printed by itself in the common way, forms an ordinary-sized Chinese volume.*

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING SIGHTS IN THE WORLD.

THE Rev. H. Venn once told his children that he would take them to see one of the most interesting sights in the world. He would not tell them what it was, but in the evening led them to a miserable hovel, whose ruinous walls and broken windows showed an extreme degree of poverty and want. "Now," said he,

"my dear children, can any one that lives in such a habitation as this be happy? Yet this is not all; a poor young man lies there on a miserable straw bed, dying of disease, at the age of nineteen, consumed with fever, and afflicted with nine painful ulcers." "How wretched!" they all exclaimed. He then led them into the cottage, and, addressing the poor dying young man, said, "Abraham Millwood, I have brought my children here to show them that it is possible to be happy in a state of disease, and poverty, and want; now, tell them if it is not so." The dying youth, with a sweet smile, replied, "Oh yes, sir; I would not change my state with that of the richest person on earth, who has not those views that I have. Blessed be God! I have a good hope, through Christ, of being admitted into those blessed regions where Lazarus now dwells, having long forgotten all his sorrows and miseries. Sir, this is nothing to bear whilst the presence of God cheers my soul, and whilst I can have access to him by constant prayer, through faith in Jesus. Indeed, sir, I am truly happy, and I trust to be happy through eternity; and I every hour thank God, who has brought me out from a state of darkness into marvellous light, and has given me to enjoy the unsearchable riches of his grace."

THE SIMPLE STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

THE simple and unprejudiced study of the Bible is the death of religious extravagance. Many read it under a particular bias of mind. They read books written by others under the same views. Their conversation runs in the same channel. If they could awaken themselves from this state, and come to read the whole Scriptures for everything which they could find there, they would start as from a dream, amazed at the humble, meek, forbearing, holy, heavenly character of the simple religion of the Scriptures, to which, in a greater or less degree, their eyes have been blinded.—*Cecil.*

SINGING OF PRAISE.

"I CANNOT," says the holy Ambrose Serle, "but shake my head, when I hear an officer of the church calling upon the people 'to sing to the praise and glory of God,' and immediately half a dozen merry-men, in a high place, shall take up the matter, and most loudly chant it away to the praise and glory of themselves. The tune, perhaps, shall be too difficult for the greater part of the congregation, who have no leisure for crotchets and quavers; and so the most delightful of all public worship shall be wrested from them, and the praise of God taken out their mouths. It is no matter whence this custom arose; in itself it is neither holy, decent, nor useful, and therefore ought to be banished entirely from the churches of God."

PICTURES IN WORDS;

OR, SCENES FROM ENGLISH HISTORY.

No. I.

A NOBLE fleet of vessels is seen leaving a foreign shore. One of them remains behind for some hours, and then sets sail; sounds of revelry are heard from her deck, where a young man and his bride seem to be the principal personages. The wind is gentle and the moon shines brilliantly, and there appears every prospect of a safe and speedy voyage; but suddenly the vessel strikes upon some rocks, fills with water, and goes down. Piercing shrieks of agony are heard from the drowning passengers and crew, and one life alone is spared.

* Abridged from the Chinese Repository, Vol. ix.

Varieties.

SHIEL AND THE REPORTERS.—For some weeks previous to the "monster" trials, Shiel, who was engaged on O'Connell's case, had been labouring under an attack of gout. He sought to escape the pain and prostration incident to a malady which peculiarly incapacitates its victims from continuous intellectual exertion, by resorting to the use of colchicum. But while he thus obtained liberation of his mind from the bondage of suffering, his physical frame remained for the most part a close prisoner, and his limbs were seldom released from their flannel swathings. In this state he set about preparing his speech to evidence. Two days previous to that fixed for its delivery in the Court of Queen's Bench, an application was made to him by some of the gentlemen engaged in reporting the proceedings in the State trials for the London press, respecting the best mode of obtaining a correct copy for the purpose they had in view. Owing to the then existing postal arrangements, they calculated that it would be impossible to give the speech correctly, yet so as to be in time for publication in the London morning papers of a particular day, if it were taken in short hand as it was spoken, and transmitted after transcription at a late hour of the night. In a word, they were anxious to obtain beforehand a copy of what they supposed he had written. Great was their disappointment at being told that, though he had the speech in his head, nothing but a few memoranda existed on paper. Far greater was their surprise when he undertook to speak it for them by anticipation. With his hands wrapped in flannel, he kept moving slowly up and down the room, repeating with great rapidity, and occasionally with his wonted vehemence of intonation, passage after passage, and paragraph after paragraph; then, wearied with the strange and irksome effort, he would lay himself down upon a sofa, and after a short pause recommence his expostulation with the jury, his allusions to the bench, and his sarcastic apostrophes to the counsel for the Crown. On he went, with but brief interruptions, and few pauses to correct or alter, until the whole was finished, and had been accurately noted down. Written out with care, it was sent to the printer; and, at the moment when he rose to speak in court, printed copies were in the hands of those who had faithfully rendered his ideas previously. As he proceeded, they were thus enabled to mark, easily and rapidly, any slight variations of phraseology; but these, for the most part, were so few and trivial as to cause little delay in the correction of the proofs. In the main, the speech was repeated in public verbatim as it had been previously spoken in private, the whole of the arrangement and nine-tenths of the language being identically the same.

CHINESE CEREMONIES AT TOMBS.—On one occasion, as I was wandering amongst these hills, a chair passed me containing a very beautiful lady dressed in the gayest satin. I caught a slight glimpse of her countenance as she passed, and was so much struck with her beauty that I instantly stood still and looked after the chair. It immediately turned off the little hill-road in the direction of a tomb that had been lately made, where it was set down by the bearers. Following this chair were two female servants and a coolie with a box of clothes, a basket of provisions, and some sycee paper and incense. The lady, on stepping out of the chair, commenced robing herself in deep mourning by putting on a gown of sackcloth over her gay dress; but on seeing I was looking on, she stopped immediately, and threw the gown to her attendants, with whom she was laughing and chattering away, as if grief and she were perfect strangers to each other. Anxious as I was to witness her proceedings, I felt it was wrong and indelicate in me to remain in my present position, so I walked onwards until a small hedge and clump of bamboos hid the party from my view. I then turned into the plantation, and selected a spot where, through an opening in the foliage, I could see all without being seen myself. The handsome widow, for such she apparently was, had again put on her sackcloth robe, her women were standing by her side, and the wailing commenced in the most business-like manner. This continued for nearly half-an-hour, while at the same time incense was burned, and various tawdry-looking slips

of paper were hung about the grave. At last the ceremony was finished, the coarse sackcloth was consigned to the coolie, and the lady, all gay as before, and with but little traces of grief, stepped into her chair and was carried away.—"*A Residence among the Chinese*," by Robert Fortune.

THE VELOCITY AND COLOURS OF LIGHTNING.—The lightning of the two first classes does not last for more than one thousandth part of a second; but a less duration in passing than one millionth part of a second is attributed to the light of electricity of high tension. In comparison with this velocity, the most rapid artificial motion that can be produced appears repose. This has been exemplified by Professor Wheatstone in a very beautiful experiment. A wheel made to revolve with such celerity as to render its spokes invisible, is seen for an instant with all its spokes distinct, as if at rest, when illuminated by a flash of lightning, because the flash had come and gone before the wheel had time to make a perceptible advance. The colour of lightning is variously orange, white, and blue, verging to violet. Its hue appears to depend on the intensity of electricity and height in the atmosphere. The more electricity there is passing through the air in a given time, the whiter and more dazzling is the light. Violet and blue-coloured lightnings are observed to be disengaged from the storm clouds high in the atmosphere, where the air is rarefied and analogous. The electric spark made to pass through the receiver of an air-pump exhibits a blue or violet light in proportion as the vacuum is complete.—*Peterman's "Physical Geography."*

ENGLISH AND FRENCH "NAVVIERS."—The English navy would continuously run out a barrow containing from three to four hundred-weight of stuff, whereas a French labourer was content with half that load. When an English contractor undertook the works of the Paris and Rouen Railway, he sent over the requisite plant, amongst which were a quantity of the usual English navy wheelbarrows. The French labourers tried them, and struck work. The result was a dangerous *émeute*, which rendered it necessary to call in the aid of the military; and, eventually, the only workmen who used the big barrows were the English navvies. The consequence was, that the English labourer received five francs a day, while the wages of the ordinary French labourer were only about two francs and a half; and even then the English workman was considered the cheapest of the two.—*Quarterly Review*.

PERPETUAL MOTION.—A correspondent of the "Builder" thinks the following instances come as near perpetual motion as any one can desire:—In the Rotunda at Woolwich Barracks there is, he says, a clock, moved by machinery, which has been going for more than forty years. He further states that he knows a gentleman who has had a watch in his possession for more than thirty years, hermetically sealed, which there is no means of winding, which tells the day of the week, the hours, minutes, seconds, months, and, he believes, years, and how far you walk in the day. It cost about five hundred pounds, and was made by a Frenchman in Paris. It was left with Mr. Oldham, of the Bank of Ireland, for six weeks, and was locked up in his strong box, when the gentleman went into the country, about twenty-five years ago, and the watch goes well, he believes, to this moment.

THE FIRST EMINENT ENGLISH ENGINEER.—The only Englishman who had at all distinguished himself down to the middle of the century was one John Perry, who successfully stopped an alarming breach of the Thames in the Dagenham Embankment; but his abilities found so little scope at home that he emigrated to Russia, and entered into the service of Peter the Great, then engaged, with his army, in cutting a canal between the Neva and the Volga. Perry styled himself "adventurer," which was the term then applied to those who undertook hazardous engineering enterprises; and the word is still in use among the Cornish miners.—*Quarterly Review*.